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ABSTRACT

The San Francisco Public Library has developed some special services for Chinese-speaking patrons. A collection of Chinese materials at the Chinatown branch now contains 9,000 fiction and non-fiction books, 9 newspapers, 19 periodicals, and over 300 phonograph records. Bilingual citizenship books are provided, as are reference books on China and the Chinese in English. Members of the Chinese-speaking community helped select books at first, and librarians now order books from Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as from local sources. Since most books are cataloged at the branch, a simplified system was developed to speed the process. Branch librarians are bilingual, providing three Chinese languages, and publicity announcements and flyers are in both English and Chinese. Many special services are given: class visits, tours, library participation in local events, bilingual programs, and music programs. Chinese residents of all ages and interests can enjoy fiction, philosophy, history, classical Chinese music, or the latest Hong Kong record hits at the Chinatown branch. (LS)

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Chinese Library Services to a Predominantly Chinese-Speaking Community

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(Speech delivered at the California Library Association Annual Conference in San Francisco, December 4 1975.)

In recent years, significant changes have occurred at the Chinatown Branch Library. A number of special services have been developed to meet the special needs of both the English-speaking and the Chinese-speaking members of the ethnic community.

This morning, I would like to limit my talk to those services developed specifically for our Chinese-speaking patrons.

Most important among these, is the development of an adult Chinese Collection of books, newspapers, periodicals and phonograph records.

This Chinese Collection was started seven years ago in 1968, in response to community pressure. It was opened to the public two years later, in 1970. Since then it has grown to a good size collection of 9000 fiction and non-fiction books, 9 newspapers, 19 periodicals and over 300 records. It is the main attraction of the Chinatown Branch Library and is used by the majority of patrons visiting the Branch today. The Chinese Collection accounts for one-third of the total circulation of the library and one-half of the total adult circulation. It has changed the face of the library during recent years by drawing in a whole new category of library users, viz. the hitherto unserved Chinese-speaking members of the Chinatown community.

Users of the Chinese book collection include people of all ages, from all walks of life and of all educational levels, such as the elementary school child, the high school teenage immigrant, the college student, the elderly Chinese classical scholar, housewives, grocery store clerks, restaurant workers, social workers, doctors and acupuncturists.

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Fiction is by far the most popular. Modern novels are always in great demand and even though we supply multiple copies of popular works, there never seems enough to go around. Masterpieces of Chinese literature such as Water Margin and Romance of the Three Kingdoms are also popular. Young adults love to read historical novels about folk heroes, folktales, funny stories, ghost stories, stories from which Chinese proverbs and idioms are derived, and last but not least, they ask for a whole variety of craft books such as model-making, magic, Chinese paper-folding as well as general knowledge non-fiction. College students take out our books on Chinese literature and Chinese history in fulfilling class assignments. Older patrons take out Chinese philosophy, Chinese biography, Chinese literature and classical Chinese books. A universal favorite is picture travel books of China which are often bulky and costly and are therefore usually kept on reference. There are so many requests for kung-fu novels that instead of buying them, we are now relying on generous donations from kung-fu novel fans who buy their own and later share them with our patrons by giving them to the library. To meet the language needs of new immigrants beginning to learn English, the Chinese Collection contains a good selection of bilingual dictionaries, bilingual fiction and non-fiction and books for learning English. Bilingual citizenship books are also provided for those preparing to take the naturalization test for American citizenship.

The reference section of the Chinese Collection contains the usual standard dictionaries and specialised encyclopedias, as well as relevant materials like the Hong Kong Annual Report, the Chinatown Business Directory. and the General Catalog of Books Published in the Republic of China. Patrons and librarians make full use of them. For example, a Chinese-Western conversion calendar is consulted in finding out when is the next Chinese New Year or what is an elderly Chinese man's birthday according to the Western calendar. I once used our herbal encyclopedia to find out the properties and curative powers of a certain Chinese herb for a Caucasian patron. We also rely on the business directory of Chinatown for a variety of requests such as: what is the name of the hardware store on Grant Ave., I wish to have my eyes examined by a Chinese-speaking optometrist, and how can I find a Chinese school for my daughter?

During the first years of the Chinese book collection, a committee of ten persons from the Chinese community took care of selecting titles. They are credited with building a sound core collection under the coordination of our first bilingual librarian, Judy Yung. I began selecting Chinese books for the collection in late 1971 when I joined the staff, thus putting Chinese book selection back in the hands of the library. Early this year, I was joined by Vivian Chan, another adult librarian who is also proficient in written Chinese, and together now, the two of us handle the selection of books for the Chinese Collection.

We do our ordering from foreign book dealers in Hong Kong and Taiwan who regularly supply us with catalogs of new titles.

Through our dealers in Hong Kong we are able to obtain books published in China. We also visit Chinese bookstores and read reviews in Chinese periodicals. Want lists are sent to the dealers asking for availability. After an order is placed, it generally takes four to six weeks for the books to start arriving by surface mail. We make payment only when the entire shipment has been received. So far, this procedure has been operating very smoothly. Although it does require more work and takes longer, we still prefer buying abroad than from local bookstores mainly because books are so much cheaper overseas and also because local bookstores may not carry the titles we want or offer a selection broad enough for our purposes.

All Chinese books, whether purchased abroad or locally, are checked in at the Branch Library. Hardbacks are sent to the Main Library's Catalog Department for full cataloging. All paperbacks are handled at the Branch. Since over 95% of our acquisitions are paperbacks, this really means that we are burdened with cataloging and processing almost all the Chinese books that we buy. The drain on staff time and energy hurts the Branch when you consider the large size of the Chinese Collection and the fact that we are also offering regular English library services as any other American library! To save time, therefore, we have adopted a simplified system of cataloging. Our call number consists of a broad Dewey class number without any Cutter number. A copy number is assigned consecutively as books are added to the collection. A combination of the Dewey class number and the copy number therefore produces a unique combination with identifies that particular title. We perma-bind all popular fiction paperbacks and the majority of non-fiction paperbacks which we consider of lasting value. Author, title and shelflist cards with Chinese and transliteration are provided for all perma-bound titles. As you may note, there are no subject cards. To compensate for this, the shelflist is located next to the author-title catalog and serves as a substitute subject catalog. Since transliteration is done according to the Mandarin pronounciation, and most of our patrons are Cantonese-speaking, using the author-title catalog is really tough for them. To help them, recently we have provided guide-cards liberally throughout the catalog singling out such names as Chiung Yao, I Ta, Yen Hsin, Lu Hsun etc. To assist patrons in using the shelflist as a subject catalog, guide-cards are provided for each broad Dewey class as well as relevant sub-classes such as Chinese philosophy, Chinese literature, Chinese history, Chinese cooking, knitting, sewing, tai-chi, kung-fu, folklore and Chinese chess etc.

So far, I have only been concentrating on the book collection. Let me now mention briefly that the Chinese newspaper and periodical collection is also an important feature of our Chinese Collection. We carry four foreign dailies and five local newspapers. Local and foreign Chinese periodicals of general and special interests are also widely read.

Our Chinese records enjoy a popularity similar to that enjoyed by Chinese fiction and kung-fu novels. Teenagers scramble for

the latest Mandarin and Cantonese hit songs; middle-aged adults and senior citizens check out Cantonese opera; teachers of Chinese culture look for Chinese classical music and folk music; while immigrant adults go for language and citizenship records. We feel it is very important to develop a strong Chinese record collection particularly because the majority of Chinese senior citizens living in Chinatown are illiterate and Chinese records are the only type of library material they are able to enjoy.

Since the presence of Chinese materials has attracted such a lot of Chinese speakers to the Branch, it follows that Chinese has to be spoken at all levels of library service. Nearly everyone on the staff is bilingual. Besides English, we are able to provide service in Cantonese, Taishanese and Mandarin. Chinese is spoken at the circulation desk, on the phone and in reference, readers' advisory and referral services. Publicity on library programs and announcements are in English and Chinese and are disseminated in the English and Chinese media. This is an example of a bilingual publicity flyer prepared for tomorrow night's concert program. Last summer, we put out this Chinese borchure describing the services of our Branch. It is aimed at the Chinese-speaking patron and emphasizes the special Chinese services that I am talking about right now. Class visits and library tours are given in Chinese whenever requested. At community fairs or other outdoor events where the primary goal is outreach, we always send a bilingual librarian.

In planning library programs, we try to select topics of Chinese interest such as bilingual slide-talks on China; bilingual workshops on Chinese chess and Chinese dough-sculpture; Chinese shadow-plays; concerts of Chinese classical music and hit songs; slide-talks on American Chinatowns and the history of the Chinese in California etc. For over two years now, we have been holding monthly programs for Chinese-speaking senior citizens. Lastly, working within San Francisco Public Library's Bookbridge Project, a bilingual volunteer is now bringing Chinese books to a Chinese-speaking shut-in.